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# The Middle East Crisis and Situation

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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FALL 1956

THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION

Mr. President, one of the weak spots in the world today is the Middle East. The weakest, most difficult, and most delicate situation, at present, exists in Syria. As a result of the recent coup d'etat in that country we find the reins of control in the hands of men who, if not communists, are closely allied to them and who look to the Soviet Union for continued economic and military assistance.

The result is that our friends - Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, Israel, and Lebanon - now find themselves confronted with a dangerous situation on their borders. It also means that the pipe line from Iraq and the tapline from Saudi Arabia - part of the life-blood of Europe - are now once again in grave danger. It means, also, that the Soviet Union has completed another leap-frog maneuver into the Middle East and it reinforces the fact that she is in the Middle East to stay.

Syria is the most heavily infiltrated nation in the Middle East and is becoming more and more dependent on the U.S.S.R. Its President, Shukri al-Kwatly, is a fence-rider and its new Chief of Staff, Major General Afif Bizri, has close ties with Moscow.

What can the United States do? Under the Eisenhower Doctrine, it appears nothing can be done unless Syria attacks one of its neighbors and, in turn, the victim of such an act of aggression appeals to us. Nevertheless, the Doctrine was and is an assertion to the effect that the United States would play a decisive part in maintaining the peace in the Middle East and that we would fill the void created by the departure of Britain and France in that area.

I am fully aware of the difficulties which face President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles in the present situation. Secretary Dulles has been in constant touch with Congress and has kept the legislative leaders fully informed.

The seeds of another Middle East war may be in the process of being planted by events in Syria. The leaders of the Army there seem to be Communist oriented. The head of the Civil Government is a fence sitter who veers with the wind. If the Soviet Union indirectly comes into control of Syria it could well become the main base -- if it is not one already -- of an intensive communist drive in the area. This drive would not take the form of military penetration, but would make itself felt in such fields as infiltration, subversion, sabotage and arms peddling. If Syria committed an aggressive act against any of its neighbors, United States could become involved under the Eisenhower Doctrine which provides for help to any Mid-East nation at its request which is the victim of Communist aggression. It appears that the Soviet Union has given on a loan basis \$450 million worth of arms. It is reported that the Soviet Union has forgiven some \$300 million of this amount leaving the Syrians owing the \$150 million.

It is further reported that Soviet vessels have been bringing arms into the Syrian port of Latakia on the Mediterranean. It is estimated that Soviet technicians of various kinds to the number of approximately 400 are now in Syria.

In Syria we find the only legally recognized Communist Party in any of the Arab states. The key figures in Syria are (1) Colonel Abdul Hamid Serraj - intelligence; (2) Kahlid Bakdash - top Communist; (3) Afif Bizri - Chief of Staff; (4) Akram Hourani - head of the Ba'ath Socialist Party; (5) Shukry Kuwatly - head of the Shaab, or People's Party; (6) Khaled - el - Azm - a rich man who has fallen on evil days and who has switched from the extreme right to the extreme left. Syria is only a pawn in the chess game.

The West has been politically outwitted, diplomatically out-maneuvered, and strategically out-flanked by the Soviet Union in Syria.



In the eleven years since independence, Syria has had seven military coups, twenty-one different cabinets, and four different Constitutions.

I would trust Loy Henderson's recommendations. The situation is grave and Syria does pose a threat to its five neighbors - not because of its power but because if it is or becomes a Soviet dominated state - it furnishes a forward base for the Soviet Union aimed at Turkey's back. It also puts Soviet Union astride the pipelines crossing Syria from Saudi Arabia and Iraq which carry 20% of Mid-East oil to Europe.

The purpose of the Eisenhower Resolution was to firm up Iraq and Jordan and other Middle East nations to maintain their independence and security; the NAT to firm up Turkey. The arms to be sent will strengthen the cordon sanitaire around Syria, will hold back aggression on Syria's part, and perhaps allow dissident elements in that country to reestablish order on a reasonable basis and may well keep the situation under control.

The Eisenhower Doctrine puts us in the Mid East, whether we like it or not, and is the only means to fill the void created by departure of France and England, and the instability of certain Arab states.

It is a hard decision for the Administration to make because of the delicacy of the situation in Syria. Perhaps, in addition to what is contemplated it might be well for the United States to consider a conference with Saud and Nasser to consider further ways and means to preserve Arab nationalism against further Soviet penetration.

The answer for the present may lie in joint action - by Britain, France, United States, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt - to ease the tensions from within and joint action to restrain them from without.

The ultimate answer does not lie with us but in the responsible attitude of the

Arab states themselves. An arms race with Soviet Union is not the answer, neither is the 6th Fleet except in unusual circumstances.

The Soviet Union - as it did to produce the Suez crisis - has now sent arms to Syria in enormous quantities. When the UN meets next week we should try to seek international control over the arms traffic in that region.

	( Met with Dulles at home on August 25 with Knowland,
	( Joe Martin, Green, Wiley, Brooks Hays, Merron,
	( Macomber, Rountree.
SYRIA	( Met with Dulles and Henderson at State Department on
	( September 4.
	( Met with Dulles - September 10 - Macomber present
	( State Department 12:30 p.m.

The Soviet Union, through Syria, now stands directly astride the pipelines from Iraq and Saudi Arabia to the Mediterranean. Their aircraft, tanks and technicians are across the Baghdad line and at Turkey's back door. Their agents and propagandists now have an advanced base within the Arab world itself.

While events in Syria constitute a grave setback for the West it has, at the same time, drawn Turkey, Iraq and Jordan closer together; it has increased the value of King Saud's rapprochement with the West; he recently supported King Hussein in the Jordanian crisis and now may prove to have a discretionary effect upon Colonel Nasser.

It has brought Washington and London more closely together in contrast to the Suez situation last year. In contrast to last year when the Arabs thought the Russians had saved them from the Suez misadventure, the events of recent weeks now lay the Russians open to the charge of imperialism. It is to be hoped that the USIA is now driving this fact home.

When the Baghdad Pact nations meet on September 23rd, the United States, for the first time, will actively participate with the full members in their deliberations. The purpose of the meeting will be to examine in the anti-subversion committee, the extent of Soviet penetration in Syria.



*No date*

*Middle East*

*Fall 1956*

MIDDLE EAST

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In an attempt to be helpful, I should like to offer the following suggestions:

1. The United States was primarily responsible for creating the Baghdad Pact. At present, we belong to the Pact's military, economic, and anti-subversion committees. Let us take the final step and become a full-fledged member of the Pact.
2. The United States should request Lebanon and Jordan to become members of the Pact.
3. Sabotaging of the Iraq and Saudi Arabia pipelines would be considered an act of aggression against Iraq and Saudi Arabia and would be met under the terms of the Eisenhower Doctrine.

Mr. President, I approve of the wait and see, let the sands settle policy of the Administration at this time. If, however, the Communist hold becomes dominant, I would most respectfully refer the above suggestions to the President and Secretary Dulles and, if they find merit in them, urge that they give them their most serious consideration.